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CARACAS FOR DAO

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [US](#) [XL](#)

SUBJECT: HAVE WE LOST THE EASTERN CARIBBEAN: DO WE CARE

Classified By: AMB MARY KRAMER FOR REASONS 1.4 (b), (d)

11. SUMMARY: (C) Public positions and policies taken by Barbados, Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines) the seven nation states of the Eastern Caribbean (EC)) appear to be diametrically opposed to those of the USG. Yet, private conversations with EC leaders, including elected officials, reveal a longing for a more visible, robust engagement in the region by the USG and a return to the days of the post-colonial/Cold War period when leaders and ordinary citizens in the region viewed the U.S. as a good and effective agent for change, both regionally and globally. Today, some leaders complain that the USG does not reward their support and imposes undue burdens on small and fragile economies. All leaders express regret that their views are not sought and there is no forum whereby USG-regional consultations can be conducted. The lack of fora contrasts sharply with the regularly scheduled meetings with the EU, UK, Commonwealth, Cuba and Venezuela. END SUMMARY.

ISLAND INSULARITY

12. (C) The leaders of EC nations are profoundly insular, in spite of frequent travel and participation in multilateral fora. Each island regards itself as unique and entitled to special treatment, particularly by the USG, in such areas as integration into the global economy and the immigration (and deportation) of its citizens. No elected leader believes he should play any role in improving or restoring the bilateral relationship with the United States. This is seen as the sole responsibility of the USG. There is a strong regional perception that if the USG does not take all the steps necessary to improve ties, it is a clear signal that the USG is no longer interested in any relationship at all.

13. (C) Extremely conscious of the status of office, EC leaders warmly welcome visits from their counterparts from Taiwan, Venezuela, and Cuba, publicly lauding the time spent by visitors in country nearly as much as the aid or assistance announced during the well-publicized visits. Memories of the golden days of strong engagement with the USG are fond, but fading: such memories cannot compete with the reality of dollar diplomacy being played by China, Taiwan, Cuba, Venezuela, Japan (targeting countries on the International Whaling Commission), and even Mexico (during the 2005 contests for OAS Secretary General and Assistant Secretary General). As time passes and younger leaders come

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to power, it becomes more difficult to persuade EC leadership to support USG positions and initiatives. The EC leaders do

not perceive any win for them by supporting the USG; at times, they see the opposite.

14. C) Recent votes in the UN and the OAS show a reluctance by CARICOM member states in general, and the EC in particular, to break from the CARICOM consensus and criticize violators of human rights or international treaties. EC leaders piously cite principled stands unquote for failure to censure other nations, even those with whom they have no diplomatic relations or historic ties, in the belief that engagement rather than censure will somehow reverse egregious violations of human rights. Currently, the EC uses its votes to leverage what is important to them (aid and assistance) rather than supporting the promotion of liberty, peacekeeping operations, universal human rights, respect for the rule of law, and free trade as a mechanism to create employment and advance national development. It is possible that behind this rhetoric, there is a calculation that not standing with the USG carries no penalty or loss, whereas standing up to Cuba, Venezuela, China, or other nations could result in punitive actions endangering perceived EC national or regional interests.

15. (C) CARICOM's unshakeable insistence on consensus decision-making is painstakingly slow and means that even one EC state can block a decision and thwart action. The Westminster parliamentary model followed by the EC means that only the Prime Minister can make final decisions. Because of small populations (Barbados with 270,000 is the largest; St. Kitts with 47,000 the smallest) there are only a handful of trusted aides to research issues and produce background information. It is not unusual for a Prime Minister to take personal responsibility for something that in a larger nation would be resolved by a mayor, town council or mid-level Ministry official. EC Prime Ministers, and members of their Cabinets, believe the same situation applies in the US. A frequent refrain in meetings with senior leadership is that a meeting between a particular Prime Minister and the President would instantly resolve all the bilateral problems, large and small. (COMMENT: There is a tendency among EC leadership to mistake meetings for action. END COMMENT.)

80S) 90S: THE SLOW DECLINE; 2000) 2005; THE PRECIPITIOUS
DECLINE

16. (U) Until the 1970s, there were still small, but visible, U.S. Navy installations dotted throughout the region, vestiges of the maritime era when the Caribbean was a vital shipping lane for the US. In Barbados and St. Lucia, people still talk of long-closed U.S. Naval Air Stations. Following the departures of the U.S. Navy outposts came the closure of the U.S. Embassy in Antigua and the U.S. Consulate in Martinique, along with the downsizing of the U.S. Embassy in Grenada (opened after the 1983 US-led intervention). In the past decade, Embassy Bridgetown saw the departure of a full-sized USAID mission, followed by the reopening of a satellite office of USAID Jamaica, the departure of the Defense Attaches (DAO) and the Technical Assistance Team (TAT), and the elimination of USG support for the Regional Security System (RSS) Air Wing.

WHAT WILL IT TAKE TO WIN BACK THE EC?

17. (C) Wooing back the EC will take time, attention from senior USG leadership, and more money for the region. However, a modest amount of money can be used very effectively in the region and may increase our influence bilaterally and in multilateral fora. (COMMENT: It should be noted that almost USD 50 million in post-Hurricane Ivan disaster relief and reconstruction funds were not sufficient to persuade Grenada to support our candidates for OAS Secretary General and Assistant Secretary General. END

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COMMENT.)

¶18. (C) One possible step forward would be to announce during the meeting with the Secretary and her CARICOM counterparts in Nassau that such meetings will occur on a regular basis (either biennially as with the UK/CARICOM consultation or the triennial Cuba/CARICOM meeting).

¶19. (C) Another would be restoration of funding for the RSS C-26 program with strict agreement on cost-sharing among the US, RSS member states, and like-minded countries (e.g., JIATF participants such as the UK, Canada, France, the Netherlands).

¶10. (C) Restoration of Fulbright and other scholarship exchanges to U.S. tertiary institutions is highly desired. Such scholarships have a positive impact as demonstrated by the numbers of U.S. alumni in leadership positions in government and the private sector throughout the region.

¶11. (C) Creation and funding of a rapid response corps of technical experts, from both the USG and academia, who can deploy to the region in response to targets of opportunity or requests for assistance by local governments (e.g., after the destruction of Barbados sole prison by fire in April 2005, we were able to bring in a team of U.S. Army temporary detention specialists to advise the GOB).

¶12. (C) Mission Bridgetown is in a unique position as it is responsible for diplomatic relations with seven nations, albeit, micro-states. Recognizing the realities of current diplomacy, we believe that a modest investment of time (with senior Washington officials) and money (to support regional institutions and bilateral exchanges) will result in medium and long-term benefits to the U.S. national interest.

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